

# Background of Simplicity

*owners:* MR. AND MRS. ERIC M. LIPMAN  
*architect:* GEORGE MATSUMOTO  
*location:* RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

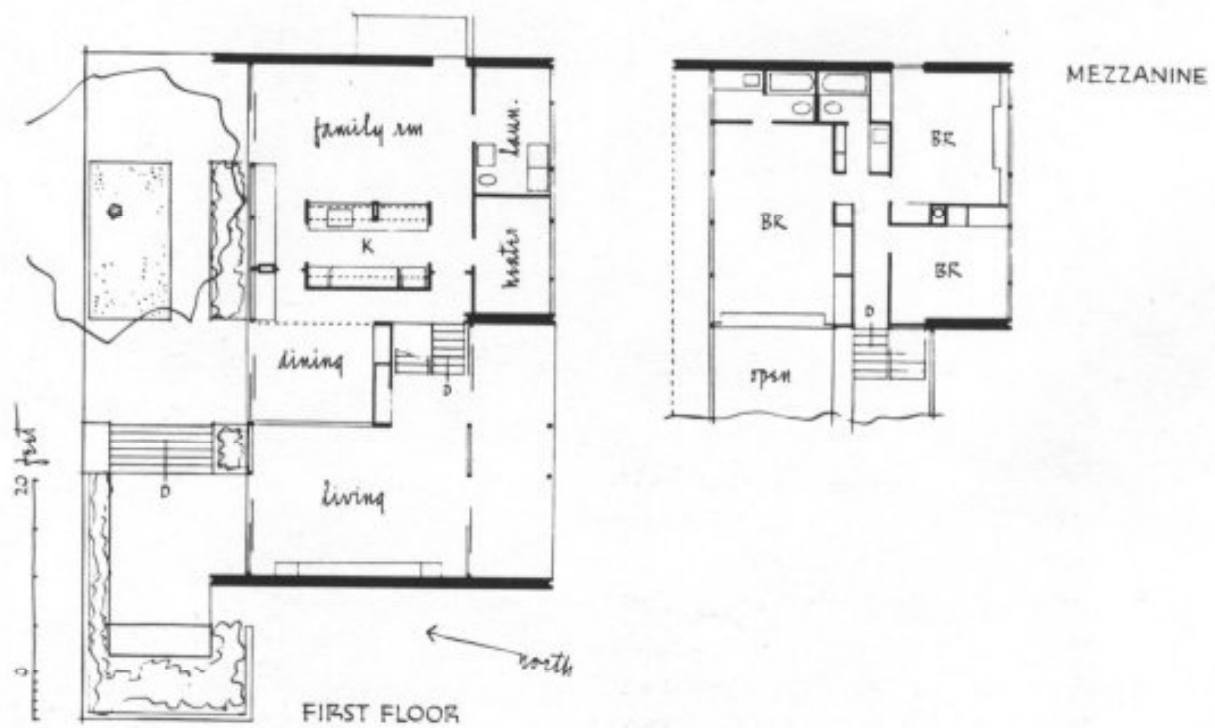
The Lipmans searched far for the designer of their house and brought the talents of George Matsumoto, a North Carolina architect, to Richmond to study their problem. That "problem" was composed of the desire to design a modern house that would be congenial to a Southern community; a steep, not very large in-town site; a collection of good contemporary furniture requiring appropriate accommodations (*collec-*







*South terrace, away from street, was cut into hillside.*



tion is not a bad word here, as some of it had been custom designed); and specific space and family use problems relevant to two adults and two daughters of school age.

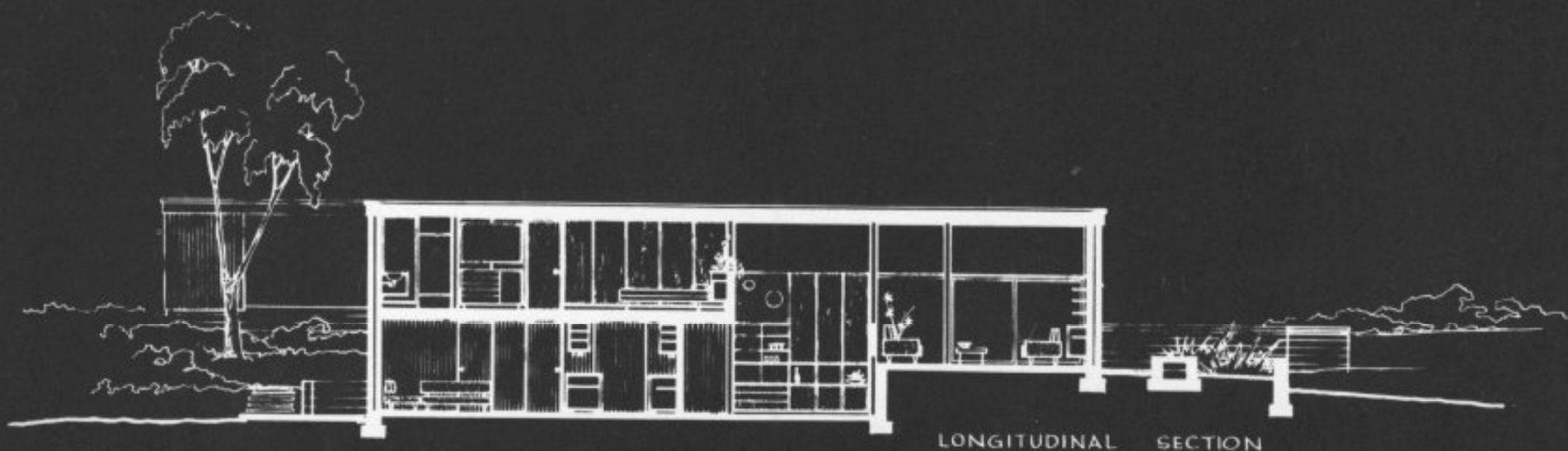
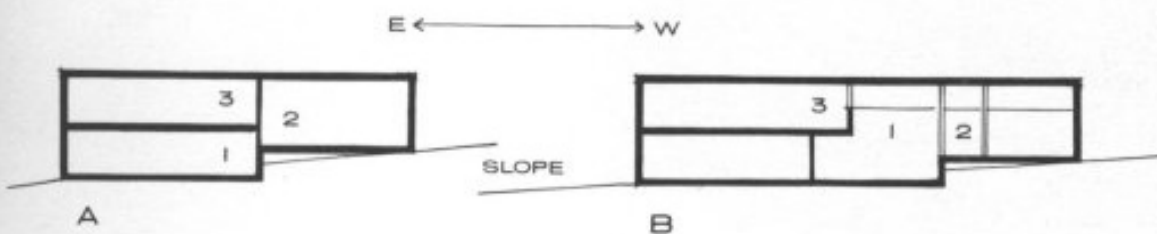
The plan and the site integrate well in the solution adopted—a story-and-a-half scheme, broken by an entry and a high-ceilinged dining room in such a way that space flows from one level to another. “In the typical story-and-a-half scheme (Scheme A),” Mr. Matsumoto explains, “the second and third levels are always pleasant, but the lower level is often hidden and

is not an integral part of the house. We wanted to feel all three spaces and their relationship. The obvious solution, Scheme B, took some time to discover, but here we ‘felt’ all levels. The location of the dining room became the key.”

Part of the lower floor was planned as a family room, a place where the girls could entertain and one suitable for large gatherings. The dining room, with its strategic location, occupies a separate space, in keeping with Virginia tradition. The living room is on the intermediate level,

and the bedrooms on the top level. The major rooms look out to a view of the James River, and there are terraces on this north side. The main entrance to the house is from the other (south) side, where the land was cut deeply to create a flat area of sunny lawn and play space.

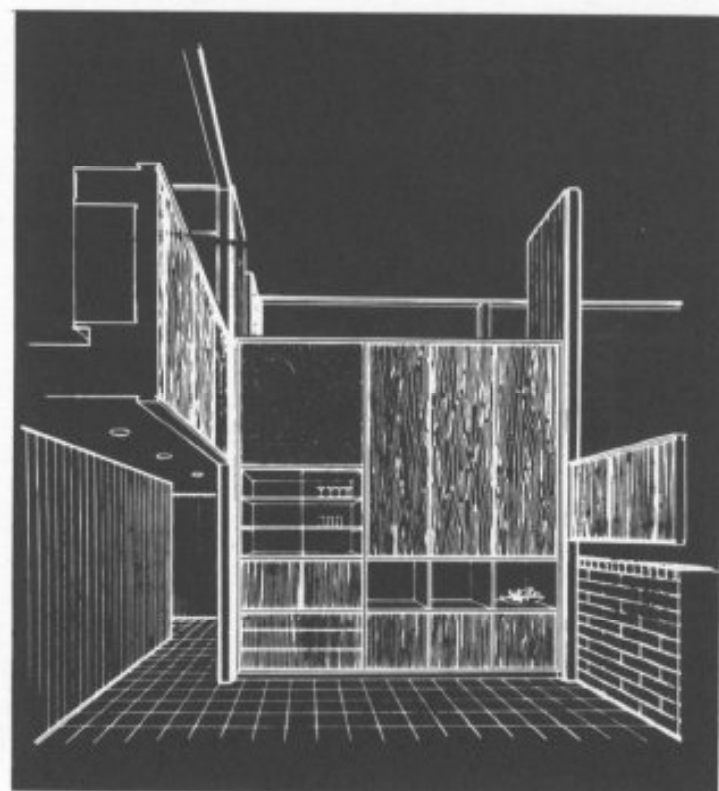
The house is wood frame, with end walls of masonry units. These masonry end walls employ cavity construction—two “wythes” of solid masonry with a space between—and this construction is frankly expressed at the end of the walls, as the photographs show. Interior finishes are wood and masonry, with sheetrock ceilings. Floors are cork, composition tile, and oak. Colors are natural wood tones, or earth colors, leaving the decorative accents to furnishings and paintings.







*Living room (above) is at intermediate level. Dining space (drawing below) is on lower level. From master bedroom one looks across dining space to living room (left-hand page).*





*Family room can be used for informal dining.*

*Kitchen serves dining space through door at far left, opens at right to family room.*



## *The Lipmans' Comment*

*Program.* Aside from the very important elements of taste and design (which were our original reasons for asking Mr. Matsumoto to be the architect of our home), our major requirements were an "activity" area separated visually and audibly from a "quiet" area; use of the living area of the house for entertaining both large and small groups; enclosed storage space with easy access, for large objects, as well as adequate normal storage for a family of four; attractive wall space for books, paintings, and the like; easy maintenance and housekeeping.

In actual use our house never ceases to be a joy. We are constantly aware of the beauty of the outdoors and the changes of the seasons. The serenity of the design is quieting and satisfying at all times; never does it become stale or tiresome. In planning for storage, Mr. Matsumoto was superb; even after nearly four years' residence, there is still storage space to spare. The integration with the site is perfect. Being on a hillside that slopes in two directions has presented problems, but under the guidance of our architect, we have added low wood retaining walls that blend into the landscaping, and we have planted fast-growing ground cover so that now we have the erosion under control.

*Open planning.* The open plan with its easy flow of traffic is fine for entertaining large groups, and for small intimate groups the living room or family room is warm and inviting. Unfortunately, noise, as well as odors, travel freely in an "open plan" so there is no really quiet retreat in the house. We hope to remedy this with acoustical treatment of the ceil-

ing in the lower level and with wall-to-wall carpeting in the bedroom areas.

*Flexibility.* The family room-kitchen combination is a very livable arrangement. The large master bedroom is used frequently as a study and has been most successful in this respect. During mild weather when doors are left open, the outdoor terrace and enclosed court become a part of the living space of the family, and they are also useful when we are entertaining.

*Glass.* The positive features of the large expanses of glass outweigh the negative. We get optimum advantage of the outdoor surroundings, and there is surprisingly little heat loss because of the perimeter heating. On the negative side, sudden cooling causes much condensation inside the glass, which can be damaging to the curtains and woodwork unless it is dried up immediately.

*Finishes.* In the main, the materials selected have been most satisfactory and quite easy to care for and maintain. Natural woods, split rock, glass, hardwood floors in bedrooms—these are all easy to live with. However, the plastic tiles are not as easily maintained as one is led to believe. Also the cork tiles used on the living room floor have been disappointing because they have bleached badly in areas not covered by rugs.

*Ornament.* There is no applied ornament in this house. Its beauty is in the textures, colors, and materials. This simplicity forms a background in which an Oriental rug is as much at home as modern furniture.